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AUTHOR Tissington, Vickie I.; Steber, Linda T.
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ABSTRACT

In light of federal budget cuts limiting traditional social service agency offerings, Ecumenical Ministries, Inc. developed an ecumenical volunteer program in Baldwin County, Alabama, to enable trained church members to recognize and address some of the unmet needs of the poor. In its first year, the successful program researched community needs and resources, surveyed existing human service agencies, produced a community resources directory for use by volunteers and agencies, created an awareness of the needs of the poor among potential volunteers, trained over 100 volunteers through a series of workshops and training sessions, and developed procedures for maintaining records of volunteers. The program developed a volunteer handbook and training manual and a series of video tapes for training. It identified the large, rural county's major areas of need as transportation, jobs, health care expenses, food, shelter, early childhood education, utility costs, and advocacy. After a year, community awareness of the plight of the poor had increased and several volunteer groups, including some low-income individuals, were providing assistance. Program funding was continued. Recommendations regarding coordination, volunteer training, and program organization, development, and planning are included. Appendices include a training outline, a list of video tapes, and volunteer record forms. (SB)

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ECUMENICAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM *

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PREPARED BY:

VICKIE I. TISSINGTON

LINDA T. STEBER

* This program was conducted under Grant #90 CW688 from ACYF/OF of the Department of Health and Human Services to Ecumenical Ministries, Inc.: Oct. 1982 to February 1984. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of DHHS or Ecumenical Ministries, Inc.

RC014681

THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ECUMENICAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM *

V. I. TISSINGTON AND L. T. STEBER

ECUMENICAL MINISTRIES, INC.

ABSTRACT

In the Fall of 1982 Ecumenical Ministries, Inc., a non-profit agency, received a grant from DHHS to develop an Ecumenical Volunteer Program in Baldwin County, Alabama. Recent Federal budget cuts had limited what traditional social services could do and the communities had been called upon to help people who have trouble meeting the basic necessities of life.

The Ecumenical Volunteer Program was to identify needs and develop methods to recruit and train volunteers from various churches in this rural county to help meet those needs. A comprehensive volunteer training program was developed complete with a resource directory, training material, and training video tapes. A number of volunteer opportunities were also identified and a system developed to keep track of volunteer hours.

The willingness to volunteer displayed by both low-income and middle to high income people was encouraging. While it was found that volunteers could help "fill in the gaps", the key to volunteer effectiveness is good training and continued professional supervision.

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ECUMENICAL VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

V. I. TISSINGTON AND L. T. STEBER *

Background

The development of an Ecumenical Volunteer Training Program was undertaken by Ecumenical MInistries, Inc. of Baldwin County, Alabama in an effort to enable trained church members to recognize and address the needs of the poor in this rural southern county. The project was intended to research the needs and to propose means to assist people in attaining the basic necessities of life, as well as the long term assistance needed to become self sufficient.

Baldwin is the largest county in Alabama. Many of the residents are engaged in the agricultural or the seasonal tourist industry. The unemployment rate is higher than the national average. A large percentage (nearly 40% overall population and 67% black population) of the residents over the age of 25 have not completed high school. Sixty-two percent of the families have annual income of less than $15,000. These are some of the primary factors which contribute to the problems experienced by many county families. Recent federal budget cuts have limited what the traditional social service agencies can do, and more people are "falling through the cracks." Through training, it was believed, that church members could learn to help "fill in the gaps" created where agency services left off

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OBJECTIVES

The major objectives of the Ecumenical Volunteer Program were:

1. To research the county to identify existing social services;

2. To develop and implement a Volunteer Training Program in at least six area churches in the major population centers;

3. To develop a Volunteer Handbook;

4. To develop a Volunteer Training Manual; and

5. To disseminate information about the Ecumenical Volunteer Program and to encourage participation in the project.

The service objectives included:

1. Providing emergency assistance to families in need;

2. Providing advocacy/liason services between clients and agencies; and

3. Providing self-help programs to increase self-sufficienty of the clients.

Procedures and Methods

The initial task was to research community needs and community resources. The Outreach Coordinator developed her contacts in the communities with not only the professional service deliverers but also with individuals at the grassroots level who encounter all aspects of need. The benefit of this range of contact lies in the variety of perspectives available. At the same time, the Volunteer Coordinator conducted a survey of the existing human service agencies. This resulted in the compilation of a Community Resource Directory which is available to volunteers and to agencies and outlines agency services, guidelines, locations, etc. The Directory helps in making appropraite referrals to agencies, as well as identifying where gaps in services exist.

The next step was to create an awareness of the poor and their plight among the potential volunteers. This was accomplished through

presentations for Ministerial Associations, Sunday School classes, women's circles, prayer groups and other church and civic organizations. Presentations were made to over thirty-three such groups, in order to begin to discuss the identified areas of need and to illustrate the benefits of a cooperative endeavor through an ecumenical effort.

The design of the Ecumenical Volunteer Program provided that separate trainings would be conducted in various parts of the county and would deal with the specific needs unique to each geographic area with some overlapping to cover the topics common to all locations. This division was necessary partly because Baldwin County is served by three different telephone systems, making county wide telephoning a major expense, because there are very apparent parochial qualities in each of the major population centers, and because Baldwin County is a very large rural county.

Initially, a series of three workshops were conducted in conjunction with seven of the most receptive local churches. These workshops encouraged participants to look beyond their immediate communities and to see what conditions exist around them. In addition to the introduction to need, participants were given an opportunity to learn the kinds of services that can be performed by trained volunteers.

Three indepth training sessions were also conducted. They were conducted in two parts. The agenda for the first day concentrated on the theological basis for the Ecumenical Volunteer Program called "Ministry in Action". The types of poverty were outlined along with a discussion of the fears about working with people in need and the importance of maintaining the individual dignity of each client served. The second session concentrated

on the techniques for putting theory into practice. Methods for identifying the "real needs" were discussed, case studies were presented and volunteers were given the opportunity to practice making referrals, to determine the immediate and long range problems. A Volunteer Handbook and Training Manual were developed as a result of the workshops. (Appendix A) A series of video tapes to be used in volunteer training were also developed. (Appendix B) (The Handbook and Training manual have already been sent to the Grants Management Office and the Office for Families.) Procedures for maintaining records on the volunteers, their interests, and hours of service were developed. (Appendix C) During the funding period over 4,000 hours of volunteer service were recorded. In addition, over 100 volunteers received training in community outreach service.

Major areas of need were identified as:

Transportation
Unemployment
Health care expense
Food
Shelter
Early childhood education
Utility Costs
Advocacy services

Federal and State budget cuts have affected all of the above needs. There are now fewer resources to help people deal with the necessities of living.

RESULTS

Most of the stated objectives of the Ecumenical Volunteer Program were met during the grant period. Community awareness has been increased through speaking to groups, through workshops and training, and through newspaper articles about the activities of Ecumenical Ministries, Inc.

One group of trained volunteers is now screening emergency aid calls from Ecumenical MInistries, Inc. main office and providing assistance in the county. Volunteers in the North Baldwin area have been trained and are staffing a telephone referral and helpline. "The Shepherd Center" in the Foley area (South Baldwin) is being developed through the efforts of volunteers. "The Shepherd Center" is being designed to help the elderly stay in their homes longer through a variety of services. A "Christmas is Sharing" program, staffed by volunteers, coordinated donations and requests for holiday assistance to needy families.

One exciting result of this program is the increase of low-income volunteers. We have learned from these people who have very few resources but are willing to share what they have with others. The greatest amount of participation of volunteers from low-income communities is in the area of food distribution.

The major accomplishments of Volunteer Program during its first year were:

- Created an awareness of the works of Ecumenical Ministries, Inc. in Baldwin County
- Identified needs and resources in the county
- Promoted the concept of volunteerism
- Encouraged churches to reexamine their community outreach efforts
- Provided meaningful volunteer opportunities
- Enabled communities to better respond to the needs of the poor
- Facilitated assessment of individual values, attitudes, skill and abilities

- Allowed the development of an ongoing pool of interested volunteers.

Recommendations

Although the program could be termed a success, there were some problems encountered which prevented achieving other objectives. Many of the churches and/or individuals confronted with an ecumenical approach to community problems were unfamiliar with the concept, or were unwilling to participate in such an endeavor. Several of the major churches preferred to control their own outreach rather than participate in a cooperative effort with other area churches. This poses some problems of coordination and duplication of services.

Although volunteers demonstrated concern about the needs of the poor and were responsive to the problems, they were unskilled and/or unwilling to seek out the needs themselves. Many volunteers were retired persons or young homemakers who had no experience in providing direct services to clients, little knowledge of available resources and limited time available to devote. What they did demonstrate was a genuine desire to serve people in need in their communities. Therefore, with the guidance of skilled professional support staff, volunteers would be able to accomplish important outreach services as: screening for emergency aid, advocacy and referral, teaching of self-help skills, and food distribution.

It would have been more effective to have developed job descriptions outlining specific volunteer opportunities based upon indentified needs prior to the recruitment and training. Volunteers responded better when asked to perform a specific task instead of selecting something

that he/she would like to do.

The period of time allotted for the development of the project as well as the amount of mon y provided proved to be inadequate to complete the expectations of the Ecumenical Ministries Board of Directors. Therefore, the Board, realizing the value of continuing the program once started has taken action to continue the Volunteer Program with private funding.

Fifteen months is the approximate amount of time it would take to research fully the need and resources existing in the communities. The next step should be to develop volunteer job description, covering a wide range of opportunities to be made available to volunteers. This would be a more effective use of time and training.

Once the preliminary research has been completed the public awareness phase takes place. A publicity campaign utilizing local media, and speaking to groups would relate findings to the churches and for the training program. A more systematic recruitment and training would result.

Conclusions

The Ecumenical Volunteer Program "Ministry in Action" has achieved the major goals it set out to accomplish. Executive Board action will continue funding the program so that the groundwork laid during the development period will be expanded and continue organizing a volunteer network to provide outreach services to the needy.

Progress is slow, and difficult to measure when attempting to promote a new program which appears to require additional time and/or money from already overworked or overinvolved churches and their members. Therefore,

it should be recognized that setting up a program similar to the Ecumenical Volunteer Program may take longer than anticipated.

It is our opinion that volunteers from the communities can be trained to provide many needed services in the community. However, volunteers cannot provide all of the needed services in a community due to lack of funds, time, expertise, motivation and professional support. The existing local, state, and federal agencies are sorely needed in the community. A volunteer program such as the Ecumenical Volunteer Program can provide many support services and help to serve those people who "fall between the cracks." Unfortunately, with cut backs in the public agencies more people are "falling between the cracks" and private funds are being drawn on more and more. We are in favor of local communities trying to meet the needs in their community. However, waning support for those in need by the Federal government and increasing taxes work against programs such as the Ecumenical Volunteer Program.

VOLUNTEER TRAINING OUTLINE

Session I - Motivational Session

A. Introductions - explanation of purpose

1. Staff and participants will introduce themselves
2. Goals and objectives for the session will be discussed
3. Attitude Assessment will be distributed

B. Theological overview tape

1. Video taped overview presents volunteering from a theological perspective.
2. Discussion of tape and feelings it arouses.

C. Grassroots Viewpoint - one or more individuals who have been assisted by Ecumenical Ministries will be present to relate their personal story. A greater awareness of needs in the county will result from this story.

D. Fears video tape

1. Aspects of individual fears about working with those in need are presented.
2. Discussion *

E. Dignity of the Person Video tape

1. Emphasis is placed on the importance in recognizing and preserving human dignity.
2. Discussion *

F. Attitude Assessment/Values Clarification - using either exercises, roleplay or discussion of the feelings of being "different" are considered.

1. The Attitude Assessment which was completed at the beginning of the workshop will be discussed.
2. Other issues dealing with attitudes, and prejudices will be discussed.

*See attached study guide

Session II - "How To" - Application of Theories

A. Volunteer opportunities

1. Sample of volunteer options is distributed and discussed.
2. Emphasis on use of ones own special gifts
3. Idea of coordinated effort discussed, meetings of those with similiar interests.

B. Levels of Involvement (Optional) for those unclear as to the degree of commitment they are able to make, discussion *

C. Identifying needs

1. Video tape shows ways to recognize spoken and unstated needs.
2. Discussion about how to actually identify needs *

D. Investigating Resources

1. Suggestions will be made about investigating individual support systems
2. Community resource listing will be distributed and explained.
3. Case studies will be used to practice skills learned to make appropriate "referrals"

E. Addressing Specific Community Needs

1. Identified community needs will be presented.
2. Strategies for meeting needs will be discussed.
3. Specific plans will be made to address problems

F. Wrap-up and Evaluation

1. Remaining questions will be addressed
2. Participants will be asked to critique the training.

* See attached study guide

VIDEO TAPES

The following video tapes were developed for use with the Ecumenical Ministries, Inc. Volunteer Program:

- Theological Overview
- Fears
- Levals of Involvement
- Dignity of the Person
- Assessing "Real Needs"

For additional information regarding the video tapes, including obtaining copies of the series contact:

Ecumenical Ministries, Inc.
P. O. Box 59
Fairhope, AL 36533
(205) 928-3613

APPENDIX C

VOLUNTEER RECORDS

1. Information concerning volunteers, their interests, abilities, and availability is recorded by the individual volunteer at an orientation session.

2. Volunteer assignments are indicated on a monthly schedule form.

3. Individual hours of service are recorded monthly on volunteer information sheets.

4. Volunteer hours are recorded by category of service for cumulating report.

Volunteer Information Sheet

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone #: (Home) _____ (Work) _____

Church Affiliation: _____

Referred by: _____

Generally available: _____ Morning _____ Afternoon _____ Evenings

My special skills include: _____

_____

My special interests are: _____

_____

Other areas of interest include:

_____ Casework	_____ Volunteer Training
_____ Handyman Services	_____ Homemaker Services
_____ Emergency Aid	_____ Office Assistance
_____ Telephoning	_____ Child Care
_____ Transportation	_____ Financial Support
_____ Fund Raising	_____ Publicity
_____ Teaching Self-help	_____ Youth Programs
_____ Migrant Workers	_____ Advocacy

_____

_____

_____

Volunteer signature Date

Volunteer Hours

January _____	May _____	September _____
February _____	June _____	October _____
March _____	July _____	November _____
April _____	August _____	December _____

APPENDIX C

MONTHLY SCHEDULE

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY

APPENDIX C

VOLUNTEER HOURS

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	FY84	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
BOARD & COMMITTEE MEETINGS													
CAMPS													
CHRISTMAS													
FOOD PANTRIES & FOOD DISTRIBUTION													
GARDEN/GLEANING													
LA CASA													
OFFICE ASSIST.													
RECREATION PROG.													
SHEPHERD CENTER													
TRANSPORTATION													
VAUGHN													
VOLUNTEER PROG.													
MISCELLANEOUS													

APPENDIX D

BALDWIN COUNTY ALABAMA

-Circled areas designate locations where training sessions and workshops have been held.

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